



Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching

Department of English Studies, Faculty of Pedagogy and Fine Arts, Adam Mickiewicz University, Kalisz

SSLT 3 (1). 131-145

<http://www.sslt.amu.edu.pl>

The Simpsons: *Translation and language teaching in an EFL class*

Elisabetta Pavan

Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy

University of Primorska, Koper, Slovenia

pavan.elisabetta@gmail.com

Abstract

My point of departure for this paper is that translation, so long neglected in foreign language teaching, can not only improve students' linguistic competences in both a foreign language and their mother tongue, but also their awareness of cultural and intercultural elements. It is a widespread popular assumption, among those not involved in language teaching, that linguistic competences are the key to learning a language and to communicating in a foreign language; consequently, they assume that translation ought to play a major role in the study of a foreign language. Indeed, late 20th century theories of language teaching, apart from the grammar-translation method, have largely ignored or criticized the role of translation. I will focus on a translation course I taught to a class of a year three Italian undergraduate students studying foreign languages, and discuss the advantages of using translation to improve students' linguistic competences, in their mother tongue and in the foreign language, and to develop their intercultural communicative competences and their cultural (Bassnett, 2002, 2007) and intercultural awareness (Kramsch, 1993, 1998). The translated text was taken from The Simpsons, season 21, episode 16.

Keywords: translation, foreign language teaching, intercultural communicative competence, intercultural awareness

In the ancient world people spoke languages, and being bi- or multilingual was common. The Romans could speak Latin in their vast empire, but studied Greek as they felt it was the “educated” language, and they did it with what we would call the direct method or total immersion. In the Middle Ages people did not travel as much as they had done under the Roman Empire: People did not move but texts did; as a consequence, there were fewer native-speaker teachers and more translations. The foreign language teaching approach which was adopted was that related to the translation of Ancient Greek and Latin, languages that had almost no orality, and people thought that any language had an unchangeable grammar, as is the case with Greek, Latin, and Hebrew (for translation in foreign language teaching see Balboni 2010; Borello 2007; Di Sabato, 2007; Mazzotta, 2006). Until the end of the 19th century, learning a language mostly meant learning the grammar of a language; for those who were lucky it consisted in interlinear translation of original texts into the source language, for others it consisted in working with highly artificial sentences which by ignoring spoken language, encouraged false notions of equivalence, with sentences divorced from purpose, context and actual use.

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, the direct method definitively rejected translation, criticizing the fact that it ignored spoken language and encouraged false notions of equivalence by presenting isolated sentences rather than connected texts. Almost all 20th century methodologies are reflections of the direct method, which aimed to teach a foreign language using that language as a means of instruction.

After the 1950s, thanks initially to structuralism and, in the 1960s and 1970s, to the communicative approach, teachers began to introduce not written but spoken language into their classrooms, using oral texts and audiovisual materials which had to be understood rather than translated. Nonetheless, grammar-translation continued to be used (and still is), especially in secondary schools and universities in many parts of the world, also because it is one of the few methods which can be adopted in very large classes.

In the 20th century most criticism of translation was based on the use of translation in the grammar-translation method and overlooked the fact that translation can be used in many other ways. Berlitz, who, from the end of the 19th century onwards, made the direct method available to a large number of language learners in Europe and America through his schools, gave very clear and straightforward directions to his teachers: no translation under any circumstances, a strong emphasis on oral work, avoidance of grammatical explanations until late in the course, and the maximum use of question-and-answer techniques. And in “the Berlitz method of teaching languages”, he gave three reasons for avoiding translations: “(i) translation wastes valuable learning time which should be devoted en-

tirely to the foreign language; (ii) translation encourages mother-tongue interference; and (iii) all languages are different ('every language has its peculiarities, its idiomatic expressions and turns, which cannot possibly be rendered by translation')" (as cited in Howatt & Widdowson, 2004, p. 224).

Thus, translation (with dictation and pattern-drills) became the worst of all evils, something to be absolutely avoided, firstly, because relying on translation and, consequently, on dictionaries, inevitably leads to often hilarious blunders, and secondly, because according to second language acquisition theory, which in the early days referred to children's first language acquisition, translation plays no role in language acquisition. Translation for language teaching has been harshly criticized (Howatt, 1984) for ignoring spoken language, for encouraging false notions of equivalence, and for presenting highly artificial and isolated sentences which often demotivate (Stern, 1992), rather than longer, coherent texts. Subsequently, translation has also been further demonized, not only as a language teaching technique, but also as a linguistic ability (Malakoff & Hakuta, 1991); nonetheless, according to Howatt (1984), the grammar-translation method is still widely used today.

Translation as a Didactic Tool

There are still occasional dissenting voices that argue that translation is primarily about language, not culture, and that the proper business of translation studies is to focus on the linguistic aspects of the translation process (Bassnett, 2007). Translation scholars must focus on language, for it is undeniable that translation is, after all, about transferring a text from one language to another. However, separating language from culture is impossible: Language is embedded in culture, linguistic acts take place in a context that is determined by culture, and texts are created by people who have different identities and belong to different cocultures. Translation is about language, but translation is also about culture, for the two are inseparable.

Conversely, in this paper translation is considered a technique, a process, which aims to develop competence and metacompetence. Following Balboni (2010) and Carroll (1980), I highlight eight parameters which can be used to assess a technique and I relate them to translation to demonstrate its validity as a technique.

1. *Relevance as the real objective of the technique.* Carroll defined relevance and affirmed that traditionally translation referred to applying morphosyntactic rules and exploring lexicon (as cited in Balboni, 2010). It is demonstrated that, with this technique, we could achieve much more sophisticated objectives.

2. *Acceptability by and for the students* and, subsequently, translation's role in supporting or destroying their motivation, and raising their affective filter (as defined by Krashen, 1982). Translating is a difficult task, and, for it to be accepted, the student must consider it as a personal challenge, related to his/her own competence and sensitivity, and not as a challenge set by and with the teacher.
3. *Comparison of results*. For a long time translation has been a means of assessment (and it still is, in certain universities); nonetheless, since the 1970s, language testing scholars have had difficulty defining what the objective of the assessment is and with the subjectivity of the corrections (Porcelli, 2007).
4. *Balance between time spent organizing and preparing the activities, and doing and correcting them*. Translation is a time consuming and difficult activity for the student, and the teacher must focus on specific learning aims.
5. *Flexibility in administration, the possibility of introducing variables*. Translation is flexible and permits many different applications: students alone, or in groups or pairs, via email, with or without a dictionary. Flexibility makes it possible to adapt to physical constraints (such as time or space in the classroom) and also to psychological constraints, such as motivating students with variety. Translation is flexible and it can easily be adapted to the diverse relational or communicative habits that always exist in a group of students. The teacher can choose between competitiveness or collaboration, that is, working or correcting alone, or in groups.
6. *It can easily be adapted to the different kinds of intelligences*.
7. *It enhances or facilitates student autonomy*.
8. *Translation activates processes* that are executed, as pattern drills did, in a quasiautomatic or semiautomatic way, but also processes that imply metacognition, encouraging the students to reflect on the process before thinking about the quality of the product.

Translation could thus be considered a valid metacognitive, metalinguistic and metacultural technique to be used in the teaching of foreign languages.

The Objectives of the Translation Process

As stated above, the objective of the course is developing students' communicative competence, and translation is suggested as a means to achieve it. In class, I conducted language activities related to the practical use of language that are not presented in this paper, since the focus here is on using translation as a technique and the way it improves students' linguistic

competence and their cultural and intercultural awareness. I adopted the three objectives and considered the aim of the use of translation in teaching foreign languages, listed in Balboni (2010): the production of linguistic and metacultural competences, of controlled rather than automatic processes, and the development of the ability to inductively discover a foreign language.

To begin with, translation aims to produce linguistic and cultural meta-competences. Competence can be achieved with many other teaching techniques which will help the student in the production and use of a target language. Nonetheless, translation can be effectively used in teaching how to use a language, and it helps students to reflect on both languages, the foreign language and the mother tongue. Students will be made aware of how different visions of the world are always present in language itself: The process is illustrated in the search for an appropriate cultural translation of the Italian expressions *amare* and *volersi/volere bene*: both refer to the Aristotelic *filia*, that is, the love for the beautiful things (*piacere*), being close as friends, and to *eros*, a connotation of pathos, which refers to feeling and passion. In English we have *love*, *like* and *to be fond of*, in French *aimer* (that also means *piacere* in the sense of liking), in Spanish *querer*, which means ‘love’ but also ‘want’ (Balboni, 2010); we can say *amare il bel canto* but we also use *amiamo* with respect to our partner. Indeed, Eco (2010) in the title of his books states that “translating is saying more or less the same thing.” The English *call me Liz* corresponds to the Italian *diamoci del tu*, a sociolinguistic formal/informal variation, while the Italian *mi stai prendendo in giro* (literally ‘you’re just pulling my nose’) corresponds to the English ‘you’re just pulling my leg.’ According to Eco (2010), difficulties are not due to the lack of linguistic equivalences, but rather to the lack of cultural equivalences.

Secondly, translation aims to produce controlled rather than automatic processes. According to Krashen (1982), the difference lies in acquisition and learning. The aim of acquisition is to train the individual to act spontaneously and automatically in social situations, producing and understanding the language; the aim of learning is to activate an output filter, which allows for proper choice in terms of lexical, and sociolinguistic appropriateness, as well as pragmalinguistics and/or intercultural communication. Translation must then be considered a means of analysis and socio-pragma-cultural comparison, abandoning the concept of equivalence and moving from “text” to “culture” (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1988; Snell-Hornby, 2006; Kramsch, 2004).

Thirdly, translation helps to develop the ability to inductively discover a foreign language. In the Renaissance, classical texts (in Latin) with an interlinear translation in vulgate were used to teach Latin. Nowadays, when people move easily and cheaply, and can experience different languages and cultures

even in their homes, the same process can be reproduced with the translation offered by subtitles on TV and DVDs, or by buying the translation of a certain book and comparing it with the original text, or by using texts that can easily be found on the Net and are or can be translated into different languages. These are good techniques to use from the perspective of lifelong language learning, especially when the languages are closely related.

The Actors of the Translation Process

Moving from translation as a process and technique to students, who are the actors of the process, the key to all learning is motivation. Motivating students to carry out a complex activity such as translation means explaining to students why they are doing it; ensuring separation between the activity of translation and evaluation; choosing psychologically relevant texts; thus making the translation a feasible task which can be carried out so as to satisfy Schuman's (1997) motivational models; presenting the translation as a complex and sophisticated challenge, a challenge in which pleasure comes from participation rather than from winning (Balboni 2010); allowing students to discover the pleasure of reflecting on their own competencies and the pleasure of achieving a conclusive text which all agree is the best possible translation both by competing with others and by cooperating with them; not overemphasizing the activity of translation per se, which is a complex endeavour; changing the approach so that the cognitive and linguistic process which underlies translation, which is constant but can be activated in various ways, is perceived not as "the" translation but as many different translations (Balboni, 1998, 2010).

Screen Translation

The importance of screen translation lies in its highly motivating impact on students, its products and its relevance for language pedagogy and linguistic and cultural metacompetences. Various researchers (Danan, 1992; d'Ydewalle & Pavakanum, 1997; Vanderplank, 1999) have conducted studies on the exploitation of subtitled material for the purposes of developing foreign language learning skills. In this regard, screen translation also has much to offer the field of language pedagogy: It improves students' linguistic competence both in the foreign language and in their mother tongue, increases their intercultural awareness and encourages them to make choices.

Before starting the activity with students, it is important to describe the different kinds of screen translation and the different techniques they require. From a didactic point of view it is of paramount importance to make the stu-

dents aware of the pros and cons of dubbing and subtitling. Translating for the screen is fairly different from translating printed items since books, newspapers and other written products are only meant to be read.

To begin with, the best-known and most common forms of audiovisual translation are dubbing and subtitling. *Revoicing* is the term used to refer to the use of translated voice tracks in the target language, such as dubbing and voice over. Dubbing involves replacing original speech with a voice track which attempts to follow, as closely as possible, the timing, phrasing and lip movements of the original dialogue; thus, it involves lip synchronization. Voice over refers to voice narration and free commentary, it is often used to translate monologues and interviews; however, in some countries it is used as a cheap alternative to dubbing (it is common for voice over to retain the original voice, at a reduced volume).

Subtitling is visual, involving the superimposition of a condensed written text onto the screen. The written, subtitled text is usually shorter than the audio because the viewer needs some time to read the captions and at the same time should be unaware that he or she is actually reading. There are two different kinds of subtitling: intralingual and interlingual. Intralingual subtitling, in the original (source) language, is normally associated with television subtitling for the deaf or hard of hearing; it may be accessed as an option and can also benefit foreign students and people with literacy problems, such as immigrants, who may wish to improve their language skills taking advantage of the audio and visual input. Intralingual subtitling includes explanatory information such as "telephone rings" or "footsteps on the porch outside"; consequently, it tends to rely on summary, while interlingual subtitles tend to be more faithful to the words uttered.

Interlingual translation is used when foreign language films are shown, in cinemas or on television, with the original soundtrack. Interlingual subtitles are widespread in those countries where dubbing is not the norm especially because it is a much cheaper option than dubbing. According to Gottlieb (1998), this type of translation is diagonal, that is, the subtitler crosses over from speech in one language to writing in another, thus changing mode and language, while intralingual subtitling is vertical, in the sense that it involves taking speech down in writing, that is, changing mode, but not language. Danan (1991) claims that interlingual subtitling "indirectly promotes the use of a foreign language as an everyday function in addition to creating an interest in a foreign culture" (p. 613).

There are countries where dubbing is the norm, such as Italy, and there are others, such as the Scandinavian countries, Denmark, the Netherlands, where it is not. In the latter, defined as subtitling countries, the standard of English as a foreign language is much higher. Among the advantages of dubbing are: less textual reduction than in subtitling, more homogeneous discourse, wider audience, no interference with images, and being unnoticed by the public that is

used to this modality. On the other side, the disadvantages include the cost and time factor, the fact that dubbing denies the audience the opportunity to hear the original voices of the actors on the screen, that it means the lack of access to the source text, and that it causes the loss of authenticity, which is also due to the presence of visual reminders. In the clip analysed below, for example, there are numerous signs and written elements or acronyms not always transparent in meaning, which needed to be translated with subtitles. In addition, sociolinguistic markers such as accent, variety and slang tend to disappear in screen translation (Chiaro, 2009), even though other solutions can be adopted, such as connoting the characters in term of their geographic, ethnic or social origin. On the other hand, if a decision is to be taken to make the text closer to the target language and culture for political, ideological or commercial reasons, changes may be introduced at various levels to help maintain the illusion of authenticity, such as changing the names of characters, places, and the soundtrack. Dubbing is then closely related to some cultural constraints, such as dialect, sociolect and specific cultural elements such as names, places, the soundtrack itself, and to the loss of the importance of the accent: In the UK for example for many people accent still indicates social/economic class and is not only associated with region, as it is, for example, in Italy.

In *The Simpsons* some characters speak a dialect or use a specific accent: Willie speaks with a Scottish accent, Montgomery Burns with a British accent, Mayor Quimby has a Kennedy accent, Apu has an Indian accent, Fat Tony has an Italian accent, and the main characters speak standard American English. The treatment of such culture-specific material can pose serious problems and a decision must be taken as far as translation is concerned, for example, with respect to proper names (the original APU becomes ABU in the Italian version, to imitate Indian pronunciation, and *Fat Tony* turns into *Tony il Ciccione*, which sounds like a mafia nickname) or to dialects and sociolects.

Translation as a Technique for Language Education

In this paper I focus on translation as a technique for language education in a class with a group of 80 undergraduate year three students doing a bachelor's degree in Foreign Languages, not in translation.

I will not deal with the development of translation skills but with translation as a class activity with foreign language learning objectives. Thus, I will mainly refer to translation as a process, partly neglecting the product of translation, since I trust processes, not products, as a means of developing competence and metacompetence in foreign language learners (Balboni, 2010; Di Sabato, 2007; Salmon & Mariani 2008).

The task was carried out in three lessons, translation theory, English language and translation practice, 45 minutes each, and in addition the students worked autonomously at home. The prerequisites for the project are:

- Students need to possess the linguistic competence level necessary to guarantee a good understanding of the foreign language.
- Translation must be felt as a challenge between the student and the text, the teacher must be a facilitator, not a judge.
- Translation is motivating only if the text is motivating.
- The translation objectives are (meta) linguistic and (inter) cultural.

To fully accomplish the task and participate in the course, the students were asked to translate for gist, to seek pragmatic and stylistic equivalence, to consider the features of the genre (cartoon), to produce different translations according to the needs of the audience (young or adult, or deaf), and to produce different translations depending on the way in which they were to be used (dubbing, subtitling).

It is thanks to the translation process that students become aware of the quantity of culture, world vision, and cultural values that are intrinsic in every word. Only when the students really understand how complex a linguistic system is, how inextricably and inexplicably every language is closely linked to the people who speak it, and how it struggles, fights, refuses to be translated, and when the same students experience their inadequacy and feel that any translation would be a betrayal, we can say that translation, as a pedagogical language technique, has been successful.

Translating the Episode: The Simpsons, Season 21, Episode 16

Before assigning students the task, I did a short research to find a video that everybody would like. *The Simpsons* was widely appreciated, so I decided to use a six minute clip of one episode. I asked the students to translate the dialogue from English into Italian, emphasising that it was an oral text.

I asked them to translate it in two (actually three, as will be presently apparent) ways, to make them aware that translations can have different ends: the first translation was for dubbing, where lip-sync is necessary; the second and third task required translation for subtitling, where division into subtitles for the general public and for the deaf public reflected the interlingual and intralingual subtitling.

For translating the episode students had to practice written and oral translation; focus on connected texts rather than isolated sentences; realise that translation may be judged by criteria other than formal lexical and grammatical equivalence (for example the promptness with which a group delivers the trans-

lation and its accuracy); develop their sociolinguistic competence, that is, their awareness of the relation of language to different social situations; and the use of dialects, that is, the language spoken in a specific geographical area, or of an idiolect, that is, the language spoken by a social group, with or without cultural functions or connotations. The students were encouraged to translate for gist, to seek for pragmatic or stylistic equivalence, to consider the features of the genre and to produce different translations according to the needs of the audience and depending on the way in which a translation has to be used (dubbing or subtitling). As stated above, screen translation improves students' linguistic competence in both their foreign language and mother tongue.

The Italian linguistic landscape is varied, not only for geographical reasons (we have regional, that is, diatopic, variations). It may be that a person from the northern part of Italy does not understand a person from the south, and that is why some of Troisi's films (a famous Italian actor and director) had to be subtitled for the "wider" Italian audience. What is considered to be standard Italian is mainly the written language, and it is perceived as a formal language when spoken off stage or out of a dubbing studio. Foreigners think that the Tuscan regional variation is that which carries the most prestige: In reality it is a regional variation and has no special social connotation for an Italian audience.

Linguistic prestige may be represented by the use of standard Italian and formal language. In *The Simpsons* the main characters speak standard US English. Secondary characters may speak dialects (defined according to the English meaning of *dialect* as a regional variation), or have a foreign accent. Willie, the school caretaker, speaks with a Scottish accent and sometimes wears a kilt. In the Italian dubbed version he speaks with a Sardinian accent. The choice may be due to the popularly perceived characteristics of Scottish and Sardinian people: rude, strong, and impulsive. Students decided that the choice to keep a regional accent and to refer to a regional stereotype was the best, even though the character wears a kilt in some episodes.

Translating an episode of a series forced the students to consider the translation as a whole (a thing they hardly ever do) if they wanted to be sure that the characters spoke "the same language" in all the episodes. As far as characters are concerned, students had to recreate an idiolect, which refers to those character's linguistic qualities which differentiated them from the others' character. They had to choose among variations, either diastratic, such as Reverend Lovejoy speaking standard Italian in a deep tone, or diatopic and regional as in Willie's speech and in Apu's speech, and also those using specific expressions, like Ned Flanders with his linguistic idiosyncrasies that are kept in the translations (e.g., okey-dokey-neighbour = *salve, salvino-vicino*), or both,

like the Jewish guide and his nephew in this specific episode, speaking quite an illiterate English, full of often wrongly used informal expressions or slang.

Students also discussed Homer's speech and his expression *d'oh*, which Matt Groening, the series' script writer, defines in the script as an annoyed grunt. Students agreed to keep it as it is in English, using a specific pragmatic tone in Italian. He is not a "clever" character, and this is made clear by making him speak slowly in coordinated, rather than subordinated, constructions.

Students' linguistic sensitivity was enhanced and developed, for example, with the translation of pejoratives such as *schmuck*: It may be translated with a wide range of adjectives, from *stupido* (less offensive) to *cretino*, to *cazzone* (very offensive and vulgar, close to the way an educated British audience could perceive it). The guide addresses the US American tourists as if he assumed they are stupid, and his nephew does the same but uses the expression *Goim* 'non-Jew.' The first was translated as *stupidi*, the latter with *gregge*. The choice was dictated by the fact that *gregge* is the typical word with which Jesus refers to his followers, a flock, given the image of the shepherd and his flock, but it is the word we also use for a group of sheep, which is the animal connotation, which, according to the Talmud, the word would have for Jews.

Another good point we discussed was in the first scene. We decided to rephrase the sentences with the homophones *but* and *butt*. Ned's sentence ("I sense a but coming...") is translated with the Italian "Sento arrivare un finale" that in English could be: "I feel a final part is coming," instead of "Sento arrivare un ma," closer to the original but not linked to what Homer said immediately afterwards. Homer's sentence ("... heeere comes the buutt") is translated with: "Ecco che arriva il fondo!", where *fondo* means 'end' but it also is the first part of *fondoschiene*, a polite word to refer to one's butt.

Dubbing and subtitling for interlingual translation does not mean translating subtitles used in an intralingual translation, for the reason we saw before. A transcript of the spoken text was made and it was used as the basis for the translation, both linguistic and cultural, wherever possible.

Many decisions had to be taken as far as "language" and culture were concerned, and this increased the students' intercultural awareness. In dubbing *scnhell*, we decided that it may be left like that, since in Italian we have exactly the same word, used mainly during winter sports competitions; nonetheless, we suggested adding the sound of cow-bells to make it clearer, omitting it in the inter-lingual subtitling and omitting it or translating it with *svelto* 'quick' for the subtitling to be used by a deaf audience.

The students had to be aware of the strong tendency to use quotation, allusion, connotations and hints in this series. The title of the first episode, broadcast on the 17th of December 1989, was *The Simpsons Roasting on an*

Open Fire, reflecting the Christmas song *Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire*, translated in Italian with *Vita da Cani* 'it's a dog's life,' because in the episode the main character is a dog. This is crucial if we wish to fully understand who the man playing the violin on the roof is: The tune evokes *Fiddler on the Roof*, a clear cultural reference to a famous musical but also to the Jewish tradition, something quite impossible to have in Italian, both because we do not know the musical (the Italian translations of musicals such as *Grease* and *Mamma Mia* have only been done recently), but also because Italians are less aware of Jewish cultural traditions.

Other cultural elements are the following:

- food: pancake and latkes, the latter being potato pancakes, products known only at the North-Eastern border of Italy;
- rituals, such as the breaking of the glass when the Simpsons' plane lands and *Lahyem*, that is, a Jewish toast before drinking, especially at wedding receptions. We decided to translate it with *cin cin* when we only wanted to refer to the toast, or *evviva gli sposi* when we wanted to keep both meanings. For the dubbing we also suggested *salute*, pronounced with a very ironic tone, as a toast by Jews to the US tourists who have just arrived;
- stereotypes: The Jewish guide is referring to his British accent (typical of Hollywood bad guys or movie villains, but he is not speaking with a British accent) and the Jews being skilled businessmen, speaking about the fact that he is taking them to his cousin's jewellery shop and the need to bargain once there.

The students had to make technical choices too. Suprasegmental elements, such as Marge's hoarse voice in the original, is kept in the dubbing; Homer's nasal voice and slower pace to denote his stupidity is reproduced in the dubbing and lost in the subtitling; Lisa's character is represented in her idiolect: a slightly Milanese accent, slow pace and open vowels.

The students had to deal with macrotextual choices, when, for example, they had to decide whether to use, or not to use, a regional accent to define a character, and microtextual choices, when they faced specific translation problems such as translating a toast or an incitement, or a colloquial expression.

Conclusion

Translation has long been stigmatised because of its past use in the grammar-translation method and it has been banished, considered old, obsolete and wrong because it is too far from the "direct method."

This paper suggests that translation can be used more imaginatively, as a complement rather than as an alternative to other teaching methods, as a theo-

retically justified activity aiding not only language acquisition but also acquisition of intercultural awareness and competence. Furthermore, translation techniques should be evaluated solely in terms of the parameters of efficacy/inefficacy in achieving its objectives and coherence/noncoherence with the theoretical assumptions of the pedagogic approach and the method used by the teacher.

Recently, the role of translation in language learning has begun to be re-appraised, and a number of writers have expressed doubts about it being completely eliminated from the classroom. Using a translation course from English into Italian to improve students' mother tongue competences may sound strange, but they in fact rarely critically reflect on their own language.

I chose to use an episode from the popular series *The Simpsons* not only because it was highly motivating for the students, but also because audio elements improve exposition to authentic language. Another reason was the episode's constituting authentic cultural visual material (despite the cartoon form), which helps students understand whenever the linguistic component proves difficult. Dubbing and subtitles mainly involve linguistic competences, but also improve the linguistic components of students' communicative competences both in their mother-tongue and in the foreign language.

The results of the Simpsons activity were positive: Students were constrained by the original text and thus denied resort to the usual avoidance strategies and were obliged to confront areas of the foreign language system which they may find difficult, and they also had to focus their attention upon the often subtle differences between the mother tongue and foreign language and to abandon the naïve view that every expression has an exact equivalent. Furthermore, the activities satisfied the cultural requirements highlighted by the most recent translation studies and growing intercultural awareness in other disciplines, which is an inevitable result of the need for greater intercultural awareness in the world today, due to the rapidly changing patterns of cultural meeting, mixing and interaction in the world we inhabit. Thus, the transmission of cultural values in screen translation motivated the students, and both their linguistic and cultural awareness have been raised as well.

Translation here becomes an act of intercultural communication rather than a skill of transferring minimal linguistic units across language boundaries, and it can no longer be taught/learned on the basis of linguistic exercises. I do not deny that linguistic skills are necessary as a starting point, such as a good competence in both languages, but these skills must be considered as part of a more basic cultural competence and must seek to handle source and target communicative contexts.

References

- Balboni, P. E. (1998). *Tecniche didattiche per l'educazione linguistica. Italiano, lingue straniere, lingue classiche*. Torino: UTET Libreria.
- Balboni, P. E. (2010). La traduzione nell'insegnamento delle lingue: dall'ostracismo alla riscoperta. In F. de Giovanni & B. Di Sabato (Eds.), *Tradurre in pratica. Riflessioni, esperienze, testimonianze* (pp. 179-200). Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane.
- Bassnett, S. (2002). *Translation studies* (3rd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Bassnett, S. (2007). Culture and translation. In P. Kuhiwczak & K. Littau (Eds.), *A companion to translation studies* (pp. 13-23). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Bassnett, S., & Lefevere, A. (1988). *Constructing cultures*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Borello, E. (2007). La traduzione nella storia della glottodidattica. In C. Montella & G. Marchesini (Eds.), *I saperi del tradurre. Analogie, affinità, confronti*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Carrol, B. J. (1980). *Testing communicative performance*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Chiaro, D. (2009). Issues in audiovisual translation. In J. Munday (Ed.), *The Routledge companion to translation studies* (pp. 141-165). London: Routledge.
- Chomsky, N. (1980). *Rules and representations*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Danan, M. (1991). Dubbing as an expression of nationalism. *Meta*, 36, 606-614.
- Danan, M. (1992). Reversed subtitling and dual-coding theory: New directions for foreign language instruction. *Language Learning*, 42, 497-527.
- De Giovanni, F., & Di Sabato, B. (Eds.). (2010). *Tradurre in pratica. Riflessioni, esperienze, testimonianze*. Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane.
- Di Sabato B. (2007). La traduzione e l'apprendimento/insegnamento delle lingue. *Studi di glottodidattica*, 1, 1-9.
- d'Ydewalle, G., & Pavakanum, U. (1997). Could enjoying a movie lead to language acquisition? In P. Winterhoff-Spurk & T. Van der Voort (Eds.), *New horizons in media pedagogy* (pp. 145-155). Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Eco, U. (2010). *Dire quasi la stessa cosa*. Milano: Bompiani.
- Gottlieb, H. (1998). Subtitling. In M. Baker (Ed.), *Routledge encyclopedia of translation studies* (pp. 244-248). London: Routledge.
- Howatt, A. P. R. (1984). *A history of English language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Howatt, A. P. R., & Widdowson, H. G. (2004). *A history of English language teaching* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Kramsch, C. (1998). The privilege of the intercultural speaker. In M. Byram & M. Fleming (Eds.), *Language learning in intercultural perspective: Approaches through drama and ethnography* (pp. 16-31). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kramsch, C. (2004). Language, thought, and culture. In A. Davies & C. Elder (Eds.), *The handbook of applied linguistics*, (pp. 235-261). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. New York: Pergamon Press.
- Malakoff, M., & Hakuta, K. (1991). Translation skill and metalinguistic awareness in bilinguals. In E. Bialystok (Ed.), *Language processing in bilingual children* (pp. 141-166). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mazzotta, P. (2006). Il ruolo della *reading comprehension* in un approccio didattico alla traduzione microlinguistica. In S. Petrilli (Ed.), *Comunicazione, interpretazione, traduzione* (pp. 139-149). Milano: Mimesis.
- O'Connell, E. (2007). Screen translation. In P. Kuhiwczak & K. Littau (Eds.), *A companion to translation studies* (pp. 120-133). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Porcelli, G. (2007). La traduzione nelle verifiche di L2: usi e abusi. In *Conference Acts, Dopo Babele: la traduzione* (pp. 68-76), Torino: Liceo Gioberti.
- Salmon, L., & Mariani, M. (2008). *Bilinguismo e traduzione. Dalla neurolinguistica alla didattica delle lingue*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Schuman, J. (1997). *The neurobiology of affect in language*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Snell-Hornby, M. (2006). *The turns of translation studies: New paradigms or shifting viewpoints?* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Stern, H. H. (1992). *Issues and options in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Vanderplank, R. (1999). Global medium: Global resource? Perspectives and paradoxes in using authentic broadcast material for teaching and learning English. In C. Gnutzmann (Ed.), *Teaching and learning English as a global language: Native and non-native perspectives* (pp. 253-266). Tübingen: Stauffenberg.